



TEAM REPORT OF FINDINGS

Burlington College

Application for

Authority to offer academic degree credit courses in Maine through the
New England Institute of Teacher Education

November 13, 2015: Augusta, Maine

November 16, 2015: Orono, Maine

The Burlington College Review Team:

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Non-voting participants:

Mr. Alan Burton
Observer
Maine State Board of Education

Mr. Ángel Martínez Loredó
Higher Education Specialist
Maine Department of Education

BACKGROUND

A Review Team appointed by the Maine State Board of Education met on November 13, 2015, to review the application of Burlington College to offer academic degree credit courses in Maine through the New England Institute of Teacher Education (NEITE). This was followed by a meeting on November 16, 2015, to gather additional information directly from representatives of NEITE.

The Review Team reviewed a self-study prepared by Burlington College and conducted a video conference with Carol Moore, President of Burlington College; Meg Daly, Burlington College Registrar; and Piers Kaniuka, Transpersonal Psychology Chair. The second meeting was with Stephen York, Dean and faculty member at NEITE, and Katherine Ring, NEITE's executive director.

The Review Team was comprised of Linda Fuller, Associate Director of Educational Studies, College of the Atlantic (Team Chair); Dr. Heather Ball, Associate Professor of Special Education, University of Maine at Machias; and Timothy Surrette, education faculty member of the University of Maine at Augusta. Ángel Martínez Loredó (Higher Education Specialist, Maine Department of Education) and Alan Burton (Maine State Board of Education member and Board Observer) participated in the review as non-voting members.

Standard A - Organization and Governance

Burlington describes a “small infrastructure of governance” including Board of Trustees, President, President's Cabinet, and Faculty, who serve as “faculty administrators” with administrative duties including hiring adjuncts and overseeing academic programs. Individuals serving in these governance roles constitute the Academic Program Committee and the Academic Review Committee, with the APC meeting weekly to review faculty issues related to curriculum, quality, and assessment. This group, and ultimately the President, has oversight of faculty and responsibility for the quality of programs offered, including those originating at NEITE.

With the development of community partnerships, faculty have created an assessment board comprised of faculty and an external expert from the field to review curricular offerings from non-accredited organizations. This appears to have been the process through which the New England Institute for Teacher Education received its approval. Instructors in external programs are also evaluated to ensure pedagogical appropriateness and are held to the same standards as Burlington College faculty.

This Standard is met.

Standard B - Institutional Objectives

Burlington describes itself as a progressive college which emphasizes experiential education and applied learning. Its mission is as follows:

Burlington College guides students to become skillful and reflective practitioners, lifelong learners, and active citizens engaged in fostering a just, humane society and sustainable, beautiful communities.

In their introductory statement, Burlington acknowledges that while it began as an institution aiming to address the needs of the immediate, local community, it is now reaching out beyond the college borders to meet the needs of various constituent community groups by partnering with community groups to provide education in various forms. It is in the process of establishing a “communiversity” in which it will partner with various organizations to award credit and expand access to higher education to regional communities. As part of its application, a diagram was included which demonstrates the manner in which individuals can enter and exit along the course of an educational pathway, beginning with high school dual enrollment courses and ending with an individualized master’s degree.

In addition to adopting the communiversity philosophy to expand access to higher education, Burlington acknowledges that its secondary objective is a vehicle for growth and sustainability. Three syllabi submitted by Burlington/NEITE include a statement of policies of NEITE including the principles of their conceptual framework.

This Standard is met.

Standard C- Degree Requirements

N/A Burlington College will offer no degrees to Maine students through NEITE; rather, students who take NEITE courses and are awarded college credit through Burlington College will have the option to apply for admission to Burlington College as a degree seeking candidate, at which point they will become a student of that institution. This application does not seek to award degrees through a Maine entity as described in Chapter 149.

This Standard is not applicable.

Standard D - Admissions Requirements

Burlington College does not have a clear set of admissions requirements, preferring instead an “application process” that “is highly personalized and holistic.” With year round rolling admissions, the undergraduate programs are not highly selective. SATs are optional and a letter of recommendation is required only if a student’s GPA is below 2.5. For its part, NEITE informally seeks a conversation with potential students prior to enrollment in a course. Assessment of student preparedness is accomplished during this conversation and/or by faculty at the start of the course. In the unlikely event that a student withdraws from a course due to difficulty with the material, information regarding credit for tuition and fees is available from the executive director.

This Standard is met.

Recommendation: If the withdrawal processes from NEITE courses are different from those originating at Burlington College, this should be clearly stated and described on the NEITE website and in course syllabi.

Standard E - Academic Programs

Because the focus of NEITE is exclusively upon offering continuing education courses at the graduate and undergraduate level, Burlington's partnership will be focused on those individual course offerings in the area of teacher education. No full degree programs will be offered; therefore, there are no degree requirements. There is potential for students who are taking NEITE courses to apply for admission to Burlington's individualized master's degree program. Those who may be interested in this academic program must go through the regular graduate admissions process and follow degree requirements outlined in the college catalog.

Within this application, Burlington has included the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Burlington and NEITE for "the purpose of establishing and achieving various goals and objectives relating to the partnership." The main objective of the MOU is to "establish a cooperative, academic partnership between the Institute and Burlington College with the primary goal of expanding professional development opportunities to adult learners through both undergraduate and graduate course offerings and programs."

A list of 29 NEITE courses at Burlington is included in the application, with many courses clearly serving as continuing education or content courses (for example, Great American Writers: Flannery O'Connor). NEITE courses offers four three-credit courses at that apply to Maine Teacher Certification (elementary/secondary general education) including:

Methods of Teaching Elementary Reading (K-8)

Methods of Teaching Mathematics (7-12)

Methods of Teaching Elementary Social Studies (K-8)

Teaching the Exceptional Child in the Regular Classroom (K-12, administrators)

All of NEITE's courses have been reviewed and approved by Burlington's Assessment Board, and NEITE faculty experts are currently reviewing and updating the content of methods courses in reading, math, and social studies. NEITE retains all rights of its intellectual property including material it creates, such as course syllabi, marketing materials, and digital media.

This Standard is met.

Recommendation: Once the review of methods courses by NEITE faculty is complete, NEITE should resubmit syllabi for all courses for approval by the Certification Office at the Maine Department of Education (MDOE) in order to ensure that these courses continue to be a valid option for coursework leading to the relevant teaching endorsements. If students will earn 3 credit hours of coursework for courses through the MOU with Burlington, which is approved by NEASC, we also encourage NEITE to verify that students are expected to spend 135 hours per 3 credit course engaged in activities related to the course.

Standard F- Faculty

As part of the MOU between Burlington and NEITE, Catherine Ring (CEO) and Stephen York (Academic Dean of NEITE) have distance faculty status at Burlington. The Assessment Board at Burlington, including an expert from the field, has reviewed and approved the credentialing and resumes of Catherine Ring and Stephen York, as well as other NEITE faculty, who are employed on an adjunct basis at Burlington. Most of the faculty on staff at NEITE have recent experience in K-12 education including employment as classroom teachers, specialists, and administrators.

Adjunct faculty teach on a per-credit basis and are allowed to teach no more than 10 credits in any semester. Burlington has an online curriculum developer who offers training and support for faculty as needed. Ratio for adjuncts is approximately the same as it is for full-time faculty (1:6). These ratios and teaching loads apply to partnership with NEITE.

This Standard is met.

Standard G - Student Services

NEITE students are considered part-time Burlington students and receive academic advising through NEITE administration and faculty. If and when an NEITE student sought admission to Burlington College, they would be assigned a faculty advisor at Burlington. Administrators at NEITE stress to students, given that they may be pursuing teacher certification or re-certification through this alternate pathway, which students should communicate directly with the Certification Office at the MDOE for information and clarification of their unique coursework needs.

As part of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Burlington College and NEITE, students at NEITE are provided access to library and technological materials, as well as transcripts, for a fee. An online curriculum developer at Burlington is available to provide technical assistance to NEITE online students upon request, otherwise student orientation to the technology for the online components of classes is left up to individual course faculty. For in-person meetings, NEITE seeks out space and accommodations that are ADA compliant and chosen based on the geographic population of the course. When students are in need of accommodations for a disability, NEITE arranges for services, such as an interpreter.

Course evaluations are conducted by NEITE, and students who may have a complaint or concern are encouraged via a statement in the course syllabus to communicate their concerns to the Academic Dean.

This Standard is met.

Standard H - Library and Learning Resources

Burlington College has allocated \$35,000.00 towards its 2016 budget that will include additional online library resources for distance students to utilize.

Burlington College has a three year strategic plan for its library that will include expanding the offerings at its physical location and improving its ability to support online students with access to library resources.

Online/distance NEITE students will be able to correspond with the librarian using traditional means of electronic communication.

This Standard is met.

Standard I - Facilities

Burlington College's supporting materials indicate that neither party owns facilities in Maine. Burlington uses a Moodle platform for courses originating at Burlington, as well as through NEITE, with GoToMeeting available to supplement courses, connect students, and facilitate student interaction.

Consideration is given to complying with the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) when NEITE offers courses at various sites throughout Maine, and Burlington College meets all New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) expectations.

This Standard is met.

Standard J - Financial Resources

Burlington College acknowledges that their financial investment in the partnership with NEITE is minimal, stating that NEITE is able to offer its courses within their existing structure. Burlington College also notes that NEITE handles most of the marketing to recruit students and that Burlington will provide few additional materials to what already exists. Burlington's current admissions and financial aid offices are adequate to support any students who decide to apply to Burlington College as a result of this partnership. Burlington anticipates that its MOU with NEITE will generate a small amount of additional revenue.

Additional financial information about Burlington College was not collected because no degree-generating programs will be offered; rather, students interested in pursuing one of Burlington College's degrees will need to apply directly to the college as a Maine student attending an out-of-state institution.

This Standard is met.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The Team found that Burlington College has the organizational and academic resources needed to carry out the proposed support of professional development courses offered with academic credit by the New England Institute for Teacher Education. With their focus on professional development rather than initial teacher certification they are prepared to offer practicing teachers opportunities to strengthen their content knowledge and/or professional practice.

RECOMMENDATION TO THE MAINE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Review Team recommends that the State Board of Education approve the request from Burlington College to offer academic degree credit courses (as listed in their application and following resubmission from Burlington College for approval by the Maine DOE Certification Office) in Maine through the New England Institute for Teacher Education. With the recommendations made for Standards D and E we further recommend a two year probationary period pending a self-study for the Board at the end of the two years.